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David A. Westbrook

University at Buffalo School of Law, dwestbro@buffalo.edu

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Bin Laden's War

DAVID A. WESTBROOK†

INTRODUCTION

War is a collective action. In order to fight together, people must be organized. Each side in a war, including this “Global War on Terror” (GWOT, as the military jargon has it) or “Global Jihad,” thus expresses a politics. The Western tradition provides many examples of militarized politics. The United Nations Charter is structured around the notion of the modern state governing a well-defined territory, and most of the writings of the seminal military theorist Clausewitz are based on a similar imagination of the belligerents. While the Charter seeks to outlaw war (except as authorized by the Security Council or in self-defense), and Clausewitz sought to explicate war’s logic, for both, war is a more or less rational expression of a sovereign state’s policy. But this is hardly the only way to imagine the politics so dramatically expressed by war. An older European tradition conceived of war on the model of a duel between monarchs, who can fight with the resources of their lands. Thucydides is often loosely cited in support of “realist” theories of interstate relations, but for Thucydides, war, at least within the Hellenic world, seemed to be essentially akin to civil war or even feud, a matter of allegiance and betrayal in which claims on loyalty and for violence were fluid, as exemplified most perfectly by Alcibiades, who variously fought for and against Athens. If

† Professor of Law, State University of New York at Buffalo, and author of *City of Gold: An Apology for Global Capitalism in a Time of Discontent*. I thank Olivier Roy and Frank Vogel for writings and conversations over the years. Andrew Bacevich, Michael Fischer, and Vincent Littrell made valuable suggestions on this text. Khurram Khan provided excellent research assistance and insightful commentary. This Essay formed the basis of a talk at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe on November 14, 2006, and I thank members of that audience for their attention and thoughts. The opinions expressed here, and of course the faults, are my responsibility alone.

wars are informed by a politics, we are driven to ask, what politics constitute al Qaeda's terrorism?

I. CONCEPTUAL DIFFICULTIES

It has been widely remarked that this war is structurally asymmetric. On the one side, the GWOT is prosecuted by states, primarily the United States, sometimes acting in concert with each other. On the other side, terrorist organizations or networks, preeminently al Qaeda but others, too, wage Global Jihad. States appear, but occasionally and in the supporting role of sponsors; the violence emanates from what are bureaucratically called non-state actors. As the awkwardness of "non-state" suggests, the asymmetry of this conflict presents practical problems for the fighters. Who are "the terrorists"? For that matter, who are the enemies of the *ummah* (community of believers) against whom jihad may be waged? Such questions are anything but abstract. Enemies must be identified, understood at least deeply enough to be recognized, in order to be fought. Although wars may be fought between sides organized in different ways and therefore called "asymmetric," the activity of warfare is structured by the division between friend and enemy and therefore is profoundly symmetric, a symmetry neatly expressed by the old image of war as a duel. Thus, to say that this war is structurally asymmetric suggests a basic problem: the situation must be constantly recast, the ensemble bifurcated into enemies and others, in order to achieve the symmetry required for the conduct of war.

While perhaps necessary for purposes of political and military organization, incessant redescription is unlikely to result in clear understanding or well-informed policy. As Clausewitz taught, immediate tactical imperatives may obscure long-term strategic objectives. In this case, our need to identify "the terrorists" requires constant reimagination, and so reconstitution, of our enemies. Very bluntly put, the question, who may be targeted? must be constantly reasked. The moral, political, and hence strategic risks of constantly redefining one's enemies, and so the war, are obvious, yet that hardly makes the problem—how do we imagine, describe, and so define our enemies?—disappear.

By treating states who harbor terrorists as enemy states, the "Bush doctrine" (as announced against Afghanistan, but also employed with regard to Iraq and, diplomatically, Libya and Syria) has attempted to give modern militaries, organized by and around territorial states with bureaucratic command structures, a homologous opponent—another state. Yet despite the Bush doctrine, the present conflict cannot be encompassed by the traditional grammar of international relations among states. The presence of al Qaeda operatives in Germany, Great Britain, and of course here in the United States has not led to war on those places, and whatever worries about the reduction of civil liberties are warranted, martial law has not been declared. The nature of the present conflict in such places requires an imagination centered on something besides the state.

But the habit of understanding war as an activity of the state—and therefore, explaining violence in terms of a *raison d'état*—dies hard. The law of war over the last few hundred years has been conceived in terms of cross border conflicts. (The International Court of Justice in the recent Israeli wall case, over an objection by Judge Rosalyn Higgins, repeated the proposition that wars are waged by states.) From this rather ethnocentric understanding of war, it has been maintained that al Qaeda is not a state, and therefore al Qaeda's violence does not constitute a war. Instead of war, we are confronted with large scale violent crime. This, indeed, was more or less the US government's position up until 9/11. Versions of this argument are still presented by human rights advocates, who seek to use the rights afforded criminal defendants to limit the powers of governments, especially that of the United States.

Without denying that terrorist acts are crimes, or that the methods of law enforcement are invaluable in waging the present conflict, or that the powers of governments should be limited, it seems perversely formalistic to claim that only collective violence organized among states deserves the appellation "war." There are many ways of organizing people to fight collectively; not all such forms of organization are states. This is an age not only of terrorism, but of ethnic violence, even genocide, and of slaughter in places where states have failed. Are such affairs not wars? For his part, bin Laden has always called this conflict a war. And after 9/11, the sheer violence of the attacks, the

scale of the sometimes classical military responses (invasion, regime change), and the understanding that terrorism, perhaps coupled with WMD technology, is the central security concern of the present time, makes it impossible to consider this conflict exclusively in terms familiar from criminal law enforcement. Bin Laden has a war, and he has the bodies to prove it.

Even Westerners who understand this conflict as a war, albeit one not between states, often implicitly imagine warfare as an activity of a state-like entity, presumed to be "rational" in familiar ways. When they seek to rationalize violence by speaking of the purposes of the terrorists, in effect searching for a *raison d'état*, Westerners generally presume that this conflict is undertaken according to familiar political logics. And post hoc rationalizations for terrorist violence can always be found; indeed rationalizations are often suggested by terrorists themselves. So it is variously said that terrorist violence is motivated by the victim's support for Israel, or the invasion of Afghanistan or Iraq, or the stationing of troops in Saudi Arabia, or by the worldwide conspiracy against Islam in general. Terrorists can thus be understood to be carrying forth a political program through violent means (all terrorists read Clausewitz).

For those trying to understand Global Jihad, non-Muslims and Muslims alike, this can be a deeply comforting view of the situation, not just a lack of imagination. From this perspective, the logic of war is that of ordinary politics, if perhaps pursued through extraordinary means, and therefore, if we wipe away the blood, violence can be understood as if it were just another political argument. Terrorists have their grievances; that is why they become terrorists. Such "arguments" can easily be abstracted and rendered anodyne. Al Qaeda's violence is often discussed in terms familiar from Western political discourse: anti-imperialism, national self-determination, the resentment bred by poverty, and so forth. The various consequences of violent acts are thus domesticated, even obscured entirely, by the translation of violence into familiar political language.

The comfort such translations might bring, however, is not without costs for the imagination and so conduct of policy. If violence is just primitive political argument, then achievement of their political objectives would make

violence unnecessary for the terrorists. Rather stark strategic choices are thus presented: the war may be ended by the identification and incapacitation of the terrorists, or by some form of conversion (Americans should recall the battle for the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people), or by some form of accommodation. But if al Qaeda is *not* like a state, and if its violence is *not* like an argument, then this mode of policy analysis is deeply wrongheaded, ethnocentric in the worst way.

Ethnocentricity is difficult to avoid, and it may be merely human to translate the shocking into familiar terms. For example, after the attacks of June 7th, 2005, Londoners recalled World War II, in which "freedom" was pitted against "tyranny." In response, Londoners again bravely vowed not to be intimidated. But were matters so simple as an opposition between the pleasures of freedom and the horrors of tyranny, an organized enemy would not even exist. Confronted with violence, we utter banal generalities, and then repeat ourselves. We often insist that the strange is in fact familiar, that we already understand what is actually shocking, like the fact that the huge twin towers are not there any more. So the Bush doctrine insists that states are responsible for war, as they have been traditionally; so terrorists are presumed to understand their violence in terms familiar from Clausewitz, as policy by other means; and so al Qaeda is compared to the Nazis. While one must sympathize, one must also realize that such longing for the comfort of familiar thinking and rhetoric is likely to obscure what is important about the new and strange.

The tacit refusal to confront the new is nowhere more clear than in the Bush administration's "war on terror," recalling wars on other abstractions, drugs, poverty, and crime. Like those other wars, the war on terror seems somewhat unwinnable, sort of a war on unhappiness, to be specified by the commitments of the speaker. Predictably enough, rather old arguments about the nature of happiness and the purposes of government have been updated for the current situation. For example, liberals have maintained that we should get after the "root causes" of terrorism, in short, poverty. But nobody really believes that poverty per se caused the conspiracy to knock down the twin towers. After all, the enterprise cost too much money. Conversely, too many poor people are not violent. At least

so far, the desperately poor and deeply Muslim country of Bangladesh has produced few if any international terrorists. From within the discourse of partisan politics in the United States, however, such objections matter little: "poverty" is simply a placeholder within well-rehearsed arguments. The discussion of the strange, al Qaeda's terrorism, continually risks degenerating into a repetition of the familiar, for instance, a debate on the possibility of the Great Society.

Well-rehearsed arguments are difficult to evaluate in part because they often address real concerns. So poverty matters. Many people are oppressed by others, or by history, or by circumstance. Energy policy is important, and so is decolonialization, and the creation and conduct of Israel, and any number of despotic regimes, and not to forget the history of U.S. involvement in the region . . . blood flows, and much has been lost. People have their grievances and their justifications, and are in the habit of repeating them at appropriate junctures, but when are such complaints really at the heart of violence? Particularly when one has heard the same thing many times before, one must ask whether the speaker expresses anything, or are such arguments a noisy form of silence? Nor can security policy be expected to wait for the elimination of poverty or even the rectification of border issues. Thus this Essay will proceed by cabining what might broadly be called economics, history, and sociology (academic techniques for explaining what people really mean), in order to try and take al Qaeda seriously.

The difficulty of thinking more forthrightly about what al Qaeda represents is not simply due to the tendency to take refuge in habitual patterns of thought, nor even just because thinking anew is hard. Thinking about enemies is a psychologically and morally difficult enterprise, especially in this case, in which a hateful intolerance is a real danger. The administration's "war on terror" is a disingenuous phrase, but perhaps good manners. When the Madrid bombings were blamed on the Basque separatists known as ETA, nobody argued that such people were not capable of terrorist acts. But, we all know, ETA is not a participant in "the war on terror." "Terror," in contemporary parlance, is a euphemism for something Islamic, something that is difficult to name without seeming to be an enemy of Islam, and hence of one of the world's great religions, and the

roughly one billion people, most peaceable and many fellow citizens, who adhere to that faith. Yet even while such divisions are resisted, whether al Qaeda is understood as "the terrorists" or as the vanguard of the *ummah*, a growing sense of polarity, of us and them, is palpable. As much as anything else, it is this polarity that makes talk of war unavoidable. But the word "terror" gives us little purchase on what constitutes the enemy, and therefore "terror" does not help us understand the nature of this conflict, notwithstanding its horrible accuracy. "Radical Islamist" is slightly more candid, suggesting something somehow Islamic, but also radical, that is, different from most forms of Islam. But different how?

Not that everyone is so squeamish. One increasingly hears very direct questions about "the" relationship between "Islam" and "violence," as if both concepts were so neatly defined that an answer could be provided quickly. Some speakers, even non-believers, go further, and argue that Islam has been hijacked, and needs to be "recovered." (How a non-believer would go about recovering someone else's religion is difficult to imagine.) On the fringes, one hears claims that Islam is inherently terrorist (and in rebuttal, similar claims about the horrors justified by the Bible), or that religion per se is the cause of violence in an otherwise rational world (forgetting the wars fought in the name of Enlightenment).

However primitive and sometimes even ill-intentioned, such questions are a step in the right direction, because they may begin an inquiry into the politics that constitute al Qaeda's terrorism. Such inquiry is made difficult, however, by the variety of violent politics with which we are confronted. While this Essay has used "Global War on Terror" and "Global Jihad" as mirror images, the terms are not really symmetrical. The security risks and conflicts addressed under the rubric of the GWOT include a great deal of violence that is conceptually (and often practically) distinct from bin Laden's idea of Global Jihad. There is no single description of potential enemies that encompasses U.S. security concerns, even if the discussion is limited to "the Middle East" or "the Muslim world," however such terms might be defined. Radical neofundamentalism is not the only politics at issue in the present conflicts. Much violence is local rather than global. Much violence is motivated by rather old-fashioned nationalism, or by

tribalism of a seemingly archaic sort, or by contemporary reconfigurations of ancient tribes, or by solidarity groups smaller than tribes, or by banditry, or by explicitly Islamic politics quite different from bin Laden's. Nor are such forms of organization discrete: a warrior's heart may hold multiple, overlapping loyalties, whatever analysts may say. In short, there is no single paradigm—comparable to the nation for nineteenth century Europe—that adequately describes the politics of the many conflicts that comprise the GWOT.

Among these various ways of organizing people to fight, however, the Global Jihad offered by bin Laden is different from prior wars, not only in the West, but in the Islamic world as well. Global Jihad is different in kind from conflict as imagined by Clausewitz or others who seek to explain war as an instrument of the state, including those who understand this war simply negatively (and ethnocentrically) as the consequence of misbegotten policies of the United States and other Western powers. Nor can Global Jihad be conceptualized in tribal or other traditional terms. Bin Laden and other radical neofundamentalists have presented us with a new and unfamiliar kind of politics, and hence of war, and appreciating these differences is a prerequisite to an informed policy.

II. BACKGROUND: ISLAMIC IMAGINATIONS OF POLITICS

Some understanding of what is new here requires some attention to what is old. To understand what makes bin Laden's politics, and hence his war, so different, it is helpful to sketch four different understandings of the relationship between Islam and political life, including warfare, that have been widely held among Muslims: (i) the Islamic politics of the Prophet and the right-guided caliphs; (ii) the diffident and somewhat judgmental relationship between Islamic discourse and everyday political life in the Muslim tradition stretching from shortly after the days of the Prophet to the present; (iii) the political Islam that arose in the twentieth century; and (iv) the contemporary, even postmodern, neofundamentalism that has emerged in recent years. Al Qaeda draws from, and must also be distinguished from, each of these understandings of Islamic politics and hence warfare.

It must be stressed that this is only a sketch, and an amateurish one at that. I am an emphatically Western academic, even if I have a longstanding interest in matters Islamic. But my topic here is not Islam or even bin Laden's war per se, but how such distant concepts may be—indeed inevitably must be—appropriated by policy elites, and made the objects of political dispute, especially in my own nation. And I believe it safe to say that, while the understanding of Islamic political paradigms offered here is a simplification, perhaps even primitive, my views are considerably more sophisticated than the imaginations that inform the vast majority of U.S. policy discourse on the subject. Rephrased, foreign policy is inevitably based upon misapprehensions, journalism rather than history, but must be undertaken nonetheless.

A. *The First Understanding (the Time of the Prophet)*

The Prophet, his companions, and his immediate successors are believed to have conducted political life in perfect accordance with the law (*sharia*). Sunnis, Twelver Shi'ites and Ismailis disagree on which successors, and so how long this period lasts, but all believe that accounts of the actions of the Prophet and companions (*hadith*), including political actions, are believed to be both sources of and guides to the nature of the law. In the same vein, the *ummah* is said (at least by Sunnis) to be incapable of making a mistake. Thus, with regard to the very early days, it makes little sense to speak of a relationship *between* Islam and political life, that is, to understand one as separable from the other. Islam encompassed political life; political life exemplified Islam.

B. *The Second Understanding (Rulers and Scholars)*

For those who are not the Prophet or immediately connected to him, that is, people who have lived in the ensuing centuries, the relationship between politics and Islam is much less clear. Islam is believed to inform all aspects of right living, and *sharia* is perfect, eternal. Politics, in the sense of ruling or administration, in contrast, is essentially bound in time. Those in authority

must make practical decisions, often based upon imperfect information and in bad circumstances. While such political decisions (*siyassa*) have the force of law, they cannot claim to have the authority of *the* law, *sharia*.

Traditionally, then, Muslim societies exhibit a tension akin to the Western tension between positive law (the will of the ruler, especially as embodied in legal texts) and justice (as determined by God or nature). This tension may be reflected in the structure of Muslim societies, in which different authorities rely on different aspects of the law. The ruler has his officials, whose actions constitute *siyassa*. *Ulema*, scholars of Islamic law who are also judges (*qadis*), rule in accordance with *sharia*. Ideally, each respects the authority of the other. Officials do not contravene *sharia*, and may even consult *ulema*. But *ulema* have no power to set policy or otherwise bind the government, although they may condemn bad acts committed by the government. Instead, the *ulema* must hope that the ruler is a good Muslim. The language of politics is, at the end of the day, not the clearest language of God. (Analogies in the West may be found in Augustinian and Lutheran traditions of political thought, with their insistence on the incomplete nature of political life, and in the strong distinction between policy and law.)

One should not overdo this distinction. The issue is contested, but nothing so absolute as a distinction between politics and religion, or separation between the state and the church, need be implied. In many Muslim societies, Islam permeates life, including political and so military life. In wars with the infidel, an explicitly Islamic discourse may prevail. For example, the Ottoman Empire's struggle with the Allies in World War I was characterized as a jihad, a holy war. Moreover, within Muslim societies, calls for reform—efforts to make society more Islamic—have occurred throughout history, most famously the *salafi* movement that began with al Wahhab in the eighteenth century. Such reform efforts have often been "fundamentalist" in character, i.e., they insisted on the primacy of the Koran and the ways of the Prophet, and were antagonistic to accretions of culture and tradition in the intervening years. Albeit in very different ways, the mystical Sufi movements sought to imbue everyday life with a greater sense of religious moment, and in doing so,

to dissolve the bounds between the transcendent and the banal.

While wars, fundamentalist reforms, and mystical movements from time to time affirmed the Islamic nature of all human life, including politics, the very extraordinary nature of such developments testifies to the status quo normal, in which policy and the institutions of administrative governance, on the one hand, are readily distinguishable from less worldly forms of life, including scholarship and the judiciary, on the other hand. Asked explicitly, Muslims might deny any distinction between Islam and politics, and hence any distinction between church and state on the Western model. This is true, in its way, but as already suggested, a simplification somewhat likely to mislead. If all authority is ultimately from God, then no area can simultaneously claim to be ungodly and authoritative. So Muslim rulers rule in the name of Islam, because no other form of rule is Islamically authoritative. That said, the distinctions between policy and law, *siyassa* and *sharia*, administration and judiciary, temporal power and atemporal authority, were central in both the early Caliphate and in the Ottoman Empire, and remain important in many places today, like contemporary Saudi Arabia. Such times and places (and this view is, historically and geographically speaking, the norm) should not be understood as monolithically theocratic, as they often are.

Perhaps as a result of this distinction between politically acceptable and more strictly religious ways of life, many Muslim societies have historically been quite tolerant of other faiths (especially "peoples of the book," Christians and Jews, and in India, Hindus), who were of course in error but hardly threats to the established order. Less happily, the separation between religious and governmental authorities, combined with Islam's near monopoly on public legitimacy, may tend to make authoritative political criticism—and hence the legal or even moral restraint of government—difficult. Political exigency all too often serves as a blanket justification for the actions of Muslim governments. More subtly, Islamic thought has tended to be less institutional than many contemporary Western minds (impressed, at least since the French and American Revolutions, with the institutionalization of political aspirations) easily understand.

C. *The Third Understanding (Political Islam).*

It is necessary to understand the diffidence of traditional Islamic thought towards the institutions of government in order to have some sense of the radicalism of twentieth-century Islamic political thought. Hasan al-Banna, Abul-Ala Maududi, the radical Sayyid Qutb, and others founded organizations (including the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Jama'at-i Islami in India) and developed a discourse that was simultaneously frankly Islamic and devoted to worldly political goals, and generally conducted outside the ranks of *ulema*. In this view, which French scholar Olivier Roy calls "political Islam," the creation of an Islamic state is the very mechanism of salvation, as opposed to the traditional view in which the state is to be endured, although the Islamic virtue of the ruler was desirable. For political Islam, religion is no longer to be thought of as compromised by political life. Instead of tolerance for the status quo, the way people live together—politics in the broadest sense—should be transformed so that Islam is realized here and now. Islam provides a worldview, a vocabulary, a logic, and ultimate authority for political action. Politics is to be subordinated to the demands of Islam; Islam must leave the confines of the mosque and transform the street, the market, the home, and most of all, the government.

Like Marxism in the nineteenth century, twentieth-century political Islam was a conceptual breakthrough, a new way of thinking, talking about, and so doing politics. Its radicalism was obscured from the West for a number of reasons, including, of course, simple lack of interest, language, distance and other barriers, and the tendency of scholars to combine engagement with objectification that is today criticized under the banner of Orientalism. Less obviously, Western political theory has tended, since the nineteenth century, to be deeply secular, and political Islam is an explicitly theological discourse, even if often not conducted by theologians. Moreover, understanding what was so radical about the emergence of political Islam requires some understanding of what had gone before, in particular, in the traditional relationship between *siyassa* and *sharia*, between the ruler and the *ulema*. For whatever reasons, however, the fact remains that a revolutionary discourse was invented and promulgated among millions of

people across continents without drawing substantial intellectual attention from Western policy elites until Khomeini's seizure of power in Iran.

Political Islam provided the conceptual and emotional resources to address the desire for modern forms of social and political organization that, in the Arab world and elsewhere, were often couched in the language of Marxism, but without having to disavow God—indeed, with God's authority. To some extent political Islam was a Muslim alternative to the avowedly atheistic grammar of Marxism. From this perspective, it is perhaps unsurprising that Marxism and political Islam share a great deal. Both discourses can be used to address local issues while simultaneously claiming that local developments are part of a grand progression. And in using a universal discourse to articulate national, even local, political programs, political Islam has traced a path roughly parallel to that taken by Marxism, which is as a philosophical matter a theory of world history, but which in practice became the rhetoric of national political movements. In practice, political Islam, like Marxism, became a language of nationalist politics phrased internationally.

The success of political Islam has been considerable. Political Islam became the governing ideology in Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan, and most recently Palestine and arguably Lebanon, and the dominant ideology of protest among Muslims throughout North Africa and the Middle East, in many places threatening the government, and can be heard across Asia. Yet for all its revolutionary significance, Roy maintains that political Islam has failed in some important ways. Islamic revolutions in Afghanistan and Iran have disappointed the victorious revolutionaries. The regime was changed, but politics proceeded too much as before. Islamic revolutions tend to become something else, and delegitimize themselves. This is not particularly Islamic; violent efforts to transform society in accordance with transcendent ideals are likely to be disappointing. (Hannah Arendt famously commented that the American revolution was the only one that went at all well, perhaps because its aims were somewhat modest and its situation, on a rich yet thinly populated continent, was special.)

As a system of thought, political Islam has not found a way to address the obdurate mundanity of political life, except by condemnation. Despite contemporary efforts at

reform, political Islam currently has little way to articulate the sources, meanings, and significance of government or politics writ large other than Islam. When political life fails to measure up to the exhortations of Islam, as it must, there is little to be said but to condemn the failings of those involved. Rephrased, political Islam has had great difficulty generating a political discourse that can be meaningfully distinguished from moral discourse. As a result, political Islam is an inadequate language for articulating, or legitimating, institutional life. Politics and institutions still happen, of course, but they do so in ways that cannot be said in authoritative fashion. Much of politics is therefore less than legitimate. Specifically, the dominance of political Islam makes it very difficult to legitimate a modern state—or international law, especially that of human rights—in many places where Western secularism is seen as an unholy imposition, un-Islamic.

D. *The Fourth Understanding (Neofundamentalism)*

Roy's claim that political Islam has failed, however, reflects a specific if widely held understanding of what politics is, namely, the construction and maintenance of a modern state and its impersonal institutions. This is hardly unfair. To establish modern yet Islamic states was, after all, the stated intention of the founders of political Islam. In a global society, however, establishing a modern state is not the only and may not be the most important way to understand political life. Indeed, political Islam has spectacularly succeeded in other senses of the word "politics." As mentioned, political Islam remains the dominant discourse in countries inhabited by millions of people. Political Islam has shown its fitness in ideological struggle. While aspects of Marxism and secular Arab nationalism have been incorporated, political Islam has largely supplanted these discourses. Conflicts that were not formerly conceived in Islamist terms now are. Consider the Islamization of the Palestinian struggle, and more recently, the Islamization of much Iraqi politics. Political Islam has thus shown itself quite capable of being "political" in the essential if horrible sense used by Carl Schmitt: the discourse can be used to organize people to kill other people.

Thus the failure of political Islam to achieve its modernist aims, viz., the creation of a modern yet Islamic state, hardly represents the end of Islamic politics. In abandoning the narrowly political, in the sense of governmental, understanding of the role of Islam in social life, political Islam has given rise to the quite different politics of neofundamentalism. Just as political Islam addresses the need to operate as Muslim in the modern world configured by states, neofundamentalism provides a way to be Muslim in a global society.

Like other religions, neofundamentalist Islam has become intensely contemporary by disentangling itself from the matrix of social relations, tradition, and location collectively referred to as "culture" in the old anthropological sense of the set of meanings and folkways that were to be found among a people who lived in a place. Instead, the contemporary Muslim may adhere to one's religion among strangers, in large cities, as an immigrant, precisely because the religion has been pared down to its essentials, a code. The neofundamentalist insistence on the essential requirements of the Koran, which can be practiced most anywhere, serves to make Islam transportable. Islam is where the believer—defined as one who has learned and attempts to follow the code—is.

Believers who come together need share very little beyond the code. Hence, neofundamentalist Islamic society is not "culture" in the traditional anthropological sense. Because neofundamentalist Islamic politics is comprised by believers, there is little need for territory, universal jurisdiction, and other apparatus of the state. Believers may form a community in the flux of great metropolises, even in non-Muslim societies, as throughout Muslim Europe. Neofundamentalist Islam produces a distinct, and minimalist, understanding of politics, and one diametrically opposed to that of political Islam, precisely on the question of the state. Where political Islam saw the state as the mechanism for the Islamicization of society, in the neofundamentalist view, there is no need to overthrow existing political regimes and establish an Islamic administration. The state can wait. When the worldwide community of believers is sufficiently inclusive, then society, indeed all societies, will be Islamic. The *ummah* then will be in practice as it has always been in principle, universal, and the question of the role of Islam in political

life with which this Essay has been concerned will dissolve, as in the days of the Prophet. Until then, a politics which understands itself in terms of a code, easily transportable and transmittable without the institutions of the state, functions quite well in the deterritorialized exchanges of global society. Thus, while its substance may seem archaic to Westerners, neofundamentalist Islam is in fact well suited to contemporary circumstances, highly modern, even postmodern, rather than archaic.

III. GLOBAL JIHAD

Consider the following possibility: bin Laden has learned how to express the politics of neofundamentalist Islam violently, through declaring Global Jihad. Indeed, bin Laden has made such violence, rather than mere religious practice, constitutive of a network (al Qaeda), a loose polity, without significantly encumbering the polity by locating it geographically or giving it a burdensome institutional structure. Indeed the polity is so unencumbered that it may be better considered "virtual," as an ideology—a code—that can be replicated at any time or place the conditions allow. And finally, consider the possibility that the relationship of politics to violence within this ideology, the way violence is encoded, is different from the relationship of politics to violence in a bureaucratic nation state, or in the cadres of a separatist movement, or even in political Islam, which endeavors to seize control of the mechanisms of the state, thereby acquiring responsibility.

To consider what such an understanding of al Qaeda might mean for strategy in the Global War on Terror, we need to specify the content of Global Jihad. But three prefatory points need to be emphasized.

First, a war against Global Jihad is a war against its underlying ideology, militarized radical neofundamentalism. The remainder of this Essay will analyze the strategic consequences of fighting a war against an ideology, and this ideology in particular. Ideas are intangible, and while the violence is real enough, this war has been dematerialized to an extent never before seen. There are fighters, but no military. There are locations, but no capital, no front, no combat zone.

Second, the extent to which Global Jihad accurately explains contemporary Islamist violence is difficult to assess empirically, and will remain so. "Why do people fight" is rarely a simple question. At some level, however, the empirical question is not only unanswerable (the subject of future dissertations), but moot. Global Jihad is clearly important. Regardless of the form and extent of belief in Global Jihad that motivates this or that individual terrorist, the ideology is loose upon the world, is indeed the center of the Global War on Terror, and hence requires analysis by the security community.

Third, the description of Global Jihad presented here is rather stylized, too schematic, and overly rigid. Ideologies tend to be mixed and sloppy. People change ideas, and hold mutually conflicting ideas at the same time. This, as discussed below, is an opportunity.

So, returning to the question with which this Essay began: what politics constitute al Qaeda's terrorism? Bin Laden's war expresses a radicalized neofundamentalism, which preaches that the failure to establish a global *ummah* is not due to the limitations of political Islam as a discourse, as suggested above, or for some other internal reason. Instead, the establishment of the global *ummah* has been blocked by nonbelievers, i.e., by those outside the *ummah* (and hence in the *dar ul-harb*, the domain of war). In fact, the *ummah* is under constant attack, sometimes overtly (as in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Iraq) and often covertly, through the oppression of Muslim countries, and discrimination against Muslims living in non-Muslim lands. If one needed to be convinced of this apocalyptic vision, evidence can be found easily enough. Most importantly, because Islam is the truth, what—besides a massive conspiracy—could prevent the flourishing of the *ummah*? And what further evidence of such conspiracy does one need besides the unwavering American support for Israel's brutal domination of Palestine and its other neighbors? Or the West's unquenchable thirst for Muslim oil? Or the ghettoization of, and discrimination against, Muslims in many Western societies? Even many non-Muslims in the West admit such things.

From this perspective, it is not too difficult to claim that the time for a truly Islamic politics has not yet arrived. The struggle against the enemies of Islam is the sufficient—indeed the only practical—step *towards* achieving a truly

Islamic society. For now, however, Islamic politics is about organizing for struggle. Here the similarity not just to Marxism, but even more to anarchism in its revolutionary mode, is unmistakable: actual, institutional, politics is deferred and becomes utopian (both very good and very vague). In place of institutional politics there is struggle, ideological and sometimes violent, and the limited organization required by the supporters of the movement.

The establishment of the Caliphate, often said to be the purpose of Global Jihad, is a rhetorical gesture, a horizon for violent action, not a political program in the ordinary sense. Global Jihad is waged mostly in non Muslim lands, or on the borders of the Muslim world. Those who wage Global Jihad have made no efforts to name a Caliph, to persuade the Muslim world of his authority, or to raise him to power in some Muslim land. "The Caliphate" is a placeholder, the place to which the world will be brought when enough violence has done enough work. (The arcadian visions of anarchists, including the Unabomber, and the dictatorship of the proletariat in Marxist thought, similarly oriented violence.)

Putting the sweet by and by to one side, at present Global Jihad expresses a politics so focused as to have vanished. If the forces arrayed against the *ummah* prevent its flourishing, then anything that can be done to hurt those forces is a victory. Political Islam's (Qutb's) aspirations for truly Islamic states have been postponed in favor of radical neofundamentalism's (bin Laden's) aspirations for violence per se. Politics is not about creating institutions through which large numbers of people live among one another and societies function. Instead, *politics is nothing more than the organization that makes the waging of jihad possible*. Clausewitz has been reversed by bin Laden. Violence is not an instrument of policy; violence is the purpose of politics. Bin Laden has done nothing less than create a new form of politics, and therefore, a new kind of warfare.

As 9/11 spectacularly demonstrated, violence itself, mass death, is relatively easy to achieve. No durable institutions are necessary. It suffices to organize just enough people to cause harm, no more. This minimalism and resulting autonomy are also new: traditionally jihad occurred in societies, e.g., the Ottoman Empire, with armies. While it was always an individual spiritual obligation, jihad has traditionally been conducted through

social institutions and therefore constrained by its context. From the perspective of Global Jihad, however, social institutions are merely targets, part of the irredeemable contemporary order. Global Jihad is not socially constrained because, like neofundamentalist Islam more generally, it is underdetermined. In principle, anyone can organize a jihadist group to fight against the *ummah*'s true enemies (however defined, and often Muslim), and many such groups have been established, jihad *a la carte*.

At this point we can see how badly our habitual understandings of warfare account for Global Jihad. From bin Laden's perspective, fighting against the United States in Iraq (regardless of the cost to an Iraqi future?) or bombing in London are not justified because such actions are expected to inspire a specific change in U.S. or British policy. Nor can such actions be thought of as an effort by al Qaeda to achieve its own political goals; al Qaeda has almost no politics to express. The members of the Hamburg cell who participated in 9/11 left Germany for training in Afghanistan with the intention of waging jihad in Chechnya. They were redirected to the United States. Violence against the enemies of the *ummah* is its own reward. Which enemies, and what results the violence is intended to bring about, do not matter. This is not Clausewitz's "policy by other means," for the simple reason that the policy has no substance.

As already suggested, Western minds (including my own) rebel at the effort to think of violence "merely" in defense of the *ummah*, which seems perilously close to pure nihilism or what has rather floridly been called a "cult of death." After all, violence, we reason, must have a reason, must be a means to some end. And has not bin Laden made various political demands (regarding Saudi Arabia, and then Israel, and then Iraq), and even a few gestures (perhaps empty) towards negotiation, at least with Europeans?

Perhaps. If we look at al Qaeda, however, actual politics—beyond operational organization and propaganda—is hard to find. Bin Laden has not attempted to take over a state, not even Afghanistan. He has shown little interest in institutions apart from those necessary to his war. Nor has bin Laden shown any sustained interest in other issues of concern to Muslims, such as health care, education, or economic development. Even warfare, the idea

of "making jihad" is unfocused, evidently because the purpose is struggle against the enemies of the *ummah*, not the achievement of specific results. Al Qaeda has made no real efforts to negotiate, in contrast, for example, with the PLO. Indeed, much thinking about terrorism policy, e.g., regarding captured airplanes, traditionally has assumed that the act of violence was a move in a negotiation. But suicide bombing does not work that way. *Paradise Now*, the title of a recent movie about suicide bombing, hardly suggests politics, a decidedly this-worldly activity. In short, it is difficult to discern any evidence of real politics in al Qaeda.

But why should this be surprising? Indeed, what ordinary political goods could a neofundamentalist group want? As discussed above, the essence of neofundamentalism is the creation of associations, groups of people who share codes, not institutions. The near nihilism of al Qaeda is merely the violent expression of the political minimalism that defines neofundamentalism. The fact that bin Laden and other terrorists offer political sounding explanations for their actions hardly constitutes doing politics. Just because members of the Baader-Meinhof gang spouted bad Marxism, or Timothy McVeigh talked in terms of the Constitution, does not mean that such terrorism should be understood in terms of its rhetoric, that the Red Army Faction was about achieving communism or McVeigh could be explained by the twists and turns of constitutional thought or history. Perhaps subsequent research will prove otherwise, but at present the widely heard proposition to the effect that al Qaeda's terrorism must be explicable by some ordinary political rationale, i.e., that the explicit ideology of Global Jihad may be safely ignored, seems to be due mostly to habit and lack of imagination.

Nor do the diverse bands of fighters, many of them converts or minorities and most thousands of miles from home, fight to defend an indigenous culture against the encroachments of modernity. They share little culture in the sense of the collective understanding and practices of a people in a particular place. Instead terrorists share a code, in which violence—directed against the enemies of the reconstituted, emergent, global *ummah*—is its own reward. Global Jihad is not the return of the repressed, that is, terrorism is not the violent outrage of an indigenous culture

overwhelmed by modernity. Global Jihad, like neofundamentalist Islam more generally, is a very contemporary, even postmodern, phenomenon. Consequently, while it is to be hoped that Global Jihad will pass into history, there is nothing about the process of modernization that makes this necessary. This is not some sort of aboriginal violence that will subside once the natives have been properly assimilated; many of the 9/11 bombers had studied engineering.

What could be a more perfect expression of a politics of negation than suicide bombing, Global Jihad's most riveting technique? Although developed as a tactic by Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers, who have long been fighting a conceptually rather conventional war of separatist liberation, as used by al Qaeda, suicide bombing is a horrifyingly concise expression of this new anti-politics. If the purpose of political life is violence, then once violence has been achieved, political life, life among other people, can be reckoned complete, and hence finished. In the same instant, in fact.

It is true that suicide bombing is not purely political. Jihad has always been understood primarily as a spiritual struggle, even when it involved physical violence. (It was widely reported that the 9/11 bombers believed they could enjoy sins like lap dancing and booze because all would be forgiven once they had succeeded in killing so many people.) Suicide bombing is thus—like monasticism—an effort to be simultaneously this-worldly and other-worldly. Its rituals of isolating the bomber-to-be, of wrapping him in white, and of promises (usually kept) of elaborate funerals and photographs post-mortem help the bomber to understand himself (somehow more horrifyingly, sometimes herself), as already gone, an inhabitant more of the next world than of this.

This point should not be overdone; al Qaeda's politics of negation remains a politics. Bombers are not completely of the next world. Suicide bombing is not only suicide, self-destruction, but also is bombing, killing others. Suicide bombing is an effort to create as much pain in this world as possible, that is, bombing is intended to affect others, and is in that minimal sense political. Moreover, and practically speaking, the next world is reached through elaborate planning and organization in this world, that is, suicide

bombing missions require some degree of political organization. Suicide bombing is thus undeniably political.

The possibilities afforded by suicide bombing, however, are vanishingly narrow. A bombing operation limits itself in time and in scope. Sooner or later the plan is executed or perhaps abandoned or foiled. The attack may be carried out or not, but at any rate is over. More generally, while political Islam rests on intense, even millenarian, hopes for politics (the Islamicization of society through the establishment of Islamic states), radical neofundamentalism despairs of political life in a global context. Through undertaking Global Jihad, the political wills of radical neofundamentalists are devoted to death, and hence the negation of lives that might have constituted a more durable community.

IV. PRAGMATICS

I have attempted to suggest (i) how bin Laden's conception of politics and hence war differs from familiar Western imaginations, (ii) how Global Jihad relates to prior understandings of Islamic politics, and (iii) how Global Jihad is a highly contemporary response to the world, in which the hope for practical politics has been virtually abandoned, reduced to a literally suicidal defense of an idealized, and deterritorialized, *ummah*. If this description of the politics expressed by bin Laden's war is even roughly correct, then what are the consequences of this reassessment of the enemy's politics for the conduct of the war?

It is of course a little odd for me to undertake this question. I am an academic, not a diplomat or a soldier, and I would think that it would be enough to frame strategic questions in a new and perhaps deeper way, leaving it to others to do their jobs of deciding on and executing the nation's policies. But this genre, the American tradition of pragmatism, and perhaps some human desire for closure, conspire to demand that I imagine myself in power, and much worse, that I imagine myself to be responsible, and prescribe. So lest I seem to duck my obligations, what is to be done?

Military action should be conducted with a view to its strategic, as well as tactical and material, limitations. The

U.S. armed forces have fewer tactical or material constraints than any military in history. Their strategic limitations, however, are profound, and flow from the ideological nature of this conflict. It is difficult to form strategy around an ideological, as opposed to more tangible, objective. More particularly, important forces within the U.S. security community are likely to resist understanding a very real war primarily as an admittedly abstract conflict with a postmodern ideology of political negation. And as discussed above, bureaucracy tends to imagine its enemies in its own terms, and Americans tend to pride themselves on their pragmatism, so ideology is unlikely to be taken seriously. Indeed, rather than take ideology seriously, U.S. military policy has often been driven by an often inappropriate expectation of "rationality" on the part of the enemy, i.e., by the assumption that the enemy will think as we do, and act accordingly. Both Vietnam and Iraq have rather conclusively demonstrated that people will fight even when it is demonstrably irrational to do so, at least as people like Robert McNamara and Donald Rumsfeld appear to have understood "rational." To make matters worse, in efforts to shift the cost-benefit analysis of its enemies, the U.S. military has found itself escalating conflicts, even at the cost of collateral damage that harms American strategic objectives without lessening hostilities. Thus the understanding of Global Jihad advanced by this Essay does not stand or fall in isolation. Other imaginations of this conflict are possible, but not without their own risks.

As also discussed above, ideology tends to be understood, not on its own terms, but as a means to conceptualize who the enemy is, thereby producing the symmetry required for warfare. So one speaks of "the terrorists" (as once one spoke of "the communists"), which may be tactically necessary but at the same time represents a shift of attention from ideas to people. But ideas, too, can be dangerous, and hard to fight. An idea cannot be killed, although it may be discredited or supplanted. As a corollary, this war cannot be "won" in the conventional sense. Seizing territory or taking capitals may be necessary, but are ancillary activities. Killing terrorists may be necessary, but we cannot "kill the terrorists" and win the war, as President Bush has suggested, because "the terrorists" are not a stable population of people who can be identified and then subdued. Instead, the terrorists are

those who at some point adopt, and act upon, bin Laden's ideology.

From within the logic of Global Jihad, every action that tends to threaten the *ummah* strengthens the logic and increases the allure of terrorism. The more successful the United States is perceived to be, the more fighting the United States seems to constitute a sufficient politics. Again, Vietnam: once the conflict was with American military might, then only a truly imperial commitment—that transformed Vietnamese nationalism into heartfelt participation in the American empire—could hope to succeed. Such imperial politics requires the establishment of an empire, not only conquest but also colonization and young people willing to die in foreign lands as administrators, and the United States never intended that for the sake of Vietnam. Failing to remake Vietnamese society, the United States assumed the role of foreign antagonist against whom a politics is defined. Similarly, and while the analogy is admittedly imperfect, fighting wars in the Middle East may seem to be efforts to dig out of a hole.

Such thinking suggests a rather traditional isolationism, but isolating this conflict is not a real possibility. Even in the Cold War, even under the spell of the domino theory of geopolitics, the United States could leave Vietnam in ways that it cannot leave the Middle East. Not even in the unlikely event that the United States (and all other societies?) were suddenly to abandon oil in favor of other sources of energy, even were the United States to abandon its support for Israel, global security and humanitarian concerns preclude allowing the Middle East to operate outside the security order.

More fundamentally still, Global Jihad is, as the name suggests, global, deterritorialized to an extent never seen before. Despite all the talk about Muslim lands, Global Jihad is hardly confined to the Middle East, indeed most of the violence occurs in border areas or in non-Muslim territories. There is no frontier in this war. It is therefore futile to hope that involvement could be avoided, and that the Muslim problem could be somewhat warily contained and gingerly engaged (on analogy with the USSR or perhaps, now, China) or ignored, even quarantined (on an analogy with much of Africa). This is a war within

globalized politics, not just a war of global scope such as the World Wars or the Seven Years War.

Moreover, the millenarian logic of Global Jihad has no internal limitation. Absent not only universal conversion, and the thoroughgoing reform of most of the people who understand themselves to be Muslims, the global *ummah* may always be portrayed as under attack. Once politics is understood to be the production of violence, the identification of a threat can be expected. As a result, there is no policy step that can be taken that will transform the role, *within bin Laden's play*, of the United States into something other than the crusader nation. Our status as the enemy is required by the logic of Global Jihad. We are the enemy because we occupy that position in the structure of radical neofundamentalism. While Muslims, including radical neofundamentalists, may well be angry over the actions of the U.S. government, it is foolish to believe that terrorist violence is some sort of logical response to U.S. government policy. Terrorist violence is a response to perceived evil, who we are ("crusaders," or better, "devils"), not what we have done, as horrible as that may be (what else is to be expected from a devil?). Devils are to be killed simply because they are devils. To think otherwise is to see this war as like wars against a bureaucratic nation state, i.e., bureaucratic politics by other means. Bin Laden's war expresses a different kind of politics, and the bureaucratic calculus does not apply.

The United States likes to see itself as a savior rather than a devil (although President Bush did ill-advisedly flirt with "crusader" language). The United States believes it is not only master of its destiny, but is actually leading history. It must be admitted, however, that this is a very American storyline. Within other storylines, we are antagonists, not protagonists, acted against rather than in control. From the perspective of radical neofundamentalism, we are the forces against which world historical, indeed cosmic, battles must be fought. And that, too, is a good story. This war is frustrating in part because it has imposed a narrative powerlessness upon the U.S. government, to which it is unaccustomed, and which it has been unable to escape. Seizing control of the narrative—being able to determine the significance of violence and thereby winning the war—would be far easier in a symmetric conflict, but that would be a different war.

With these considerable strategic limitations in mind, and while terror remains, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are hardly resolved, and we contemplate intervention in Iran and Sudan, may we hope for more than the ruthlessness implicit in understanding this war as a clash between an American version of bureaucratic modernity and the enthusiastic nihilism of Global Jihad, in which the two sides have no language with which to talk to one another, no way to negotiate a peace?

I believe the answer to be yes. My hope requires Global Jihad not only to be combated by force of arms, but *supplanted* by different politics, in which violence in support of the ideal of the *ummah* is not sufficient for political life. Rephrased, Global Jihad will be over when nobody in the Muslim world believes that the *ummah* can be constituted by suicide, when nobody believes that politics is no more than killing. Perhaps a few remarks can be ventured, by a very Western theorist, about the forms of politics that may obviate Global Jihad.

Such politics must be legitimate among the sorts of believers who today form bin Laden's troops. Therefore such politics must be substantively Islamic, even though differences in emphasis and doctrine are to be expected.

A new Islamic politics needs to speak—as bin Laden and neofundamentalism have spoken—to the circumstances of contemporary Muslims. As a result, politics must be felt to be in some deep sense modern, appropriate now. This is not a war *against* modernity, as so many pundits have maintained. This is a war *about* modernity. Such politics must be felt to be authentic, rather than imposed on Muslims from without. Muslims require—and I believe they are constructing—Islamic understandings of modernity that render bin Laden's understanding of contemporary politics a bad dream, and so his war the expression of a nightmare, evil but also foolish. We are, in short, waiting for a fifth understanding in the history of Islamic politics, and so yes, this may be a long war.

What does this mean for the United States and other Western military and security forces engaged in this war? If bin Laden's politics and so his war are not organized by worldly interests, and if the conclusion of this war requires Muslims to develop and adopt new imaginations of politics, a fundamentally unpredictable matter, then there might

seem to be little scope for bureaucratic rationality, the stuff of modern governments in general, and security policy in particular. Indeed, neither the U.S. government, including its military, nor other Western bureaucracies can "solve" the problem posed by bin Laden, and thus in some very real sense this war cannot be won by Western military action alone. So the question becomes how, in this environment, should governments act? And because Clausewitz was right that political actions, including military actions, should be understood as language, then this question should also be phrased: how should U.S. actions be spoken? How can they be heard?

Most obviously, the military's efforts to prevent terrorism, and combat terrorists, will and should continue, but those efforts should be understood as essentially tactical. No amount of killing will make the ideas put forth by bin Laden impossible to hold; no amount of bombing will make such beliefs any more unreasonable. This is a struggle with *the call* for Global Jihad, and therefore must be waged on the plane of thought and belief, and only incidentally on the battlefield.

A lawyer and an academic is likely to try and translate such struggle into a more or less rational argument. But this is probably futile, merely what I am trained to do, not what should be done. As I have tried to make clear, within the logic of Global Jihad, no political argument is possible: the role of the crusaders is to be evil devils, and to die accordingly. "We wanted to kill Americans." The struggle over radical neofundamentalism is not a "battle of ideas," to be won through the intellectual equivalent of an artillery duel. Debate teams do not change minds; frontal arguments are rarely if ever persuasive. Why waste time arguing with the devil?

The Global War on Terror is inescapably politics by other means, but *the strategic political engagement should not be with the enemy, the terrorists, at all*. The U.S. conduct of its war should be strategically guided by political consideration of Muslims who are *not* in thrall to the ideology of radicalized neofundamentalism, who are not enemies, but who may be in a position to develop a new Islamic politics. Even this is not entirely new to the security community: during the Cold War, a great many political activities, indeed entire wars, were strategically guided by the engagement with those who were not (yet) committed to

Communism. So while the Global War on Terror will continue, Global Jihad cannot be defeated through that confrontation. The struggle with Global Jihad must be won *outside* the confrontation with identified terrorists, through the development of a new Islamic politics that would make Global Jihad passé.

V. GUIDELINES FOR STRATEGY

I offer four guidelines that can be used to guide U.S. policy as it confronts Global Jihad. The U.S. government should (i) refuse to take direction, (ii) be fair, (iii) be responsible, especially for violence, and (iv) be patient. Let me specify.

A. *Refusing to Take Direction*

While Muslims themselves must develop a new Islamic politics, as we have seen, there are many things that non-Islamic governments can do wrong. Wars can be fought badly; reconstructions bungled; people tortured and otherwise abused; the religion insulted—governments can open themselves to the charge that they are threatening the *ummah*, that this is another crusade, and so forth. The United States must continually be aware of the danger of playing the role of “enemy” in bin Laden’s play, and thereby precluding the success of other Islamic understandings of politics. Whatever the tactical gains in the war on terror may have been, the U.S. willingness to abandon its military professionalism and legal virtues has done a great deal of damage to U.S. strategic interests, which require an Islamically authoritative politics to supplant radicalized neofundamentalism.

B. *Being Fair*

If this war is to be “won,” as opposed to merely contained, only with a fundamental change in political ideology among Muslims, then the U.S. national interest is to foster the evolution and development of alternative Islamic political discourses, in the plural. Without descending into a vacuous political correctness, “Islam” should not be understood in monolithic or deterministic fashion, as requiring this or that form of social life, law, or

stance. As a very practical corollary, Muslim countries, sectors of societies, and even individuals must be treated fairly, i.e., on an individual basis. From this perspective, the mass detentions at Guantanamo and elsewhere are disastrous in part because the United States is seen to be treating all Muslims, without regard to particular circumstances, as alike (just as bin Laden says). Which is not to deny that perceptions matter, and the absence of an institutional connection, e.g., between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda, means that the one is irrelevant to another. The political arena is not a courtroom; Vietnam and Somalia and the standoff in Iraq all mattered to al Qaeda going into September 11th. The difficulty, then, is to draw distinctions fairly, to pick enemies wisely, within an inescapably interconnected theater of operations.

C. Being Responsible, Especially for Violence

Taking Clausewitz's idea that war is political seriously means also that war is deeply human, and must be waged first and last among humans. Powerful elements within the U.S. establishment have attempted to mechanize war whenever possible. While mechanization generally has led to the increased lethality of U.S. forces, killing is relatively easy, at least for those with sufficient money and hence tools. But this is merely tactics, as Vietnam and other conflicts in which U.S. forces achieved a high kill ratio but did not achieve their strategic objectives should have taught us by now. Mechanized war, in which a force comes, kills, and leaves, tends to be unconvincing to those left standing, because it is politically almost irrelevant. The fundamental distinction between enemy and ally, those who fight against us and those who fight with us, is rarely disturbed by mechanized warfare of the sort favored by Rumsfeld and others in the recent Iraq war. (Not least of the ironies in the recent exercises of direct civilian control over the U.S. military is the fact that the civilians in question are politically obtuse in important ways.)

Successful military action allows more convincing forms of political engagement with the defeated enemy. The significance of boots on the ground, as with cops on the beat, is that human presence changes the structure of local society, at least temporarily. By virtue of superior physical force, new men and women take control in a locality, lead,

and embody that responsibility with their physical presence. Society, the forms of human interaction in that locality, are thereby changed. (Consider, in contrast, a bombing raid.) Once a local society has changed, so has the range of political possibility. If the change appears to be durable, or to cause other durable changes (the adoption of a new constitutional government, perhaps) then the inhabitants will change their politics in order to act within the new environment. This is familiar to military thinkers as textbook counterinsurgency doctrine. The difference today is that what was once irregular warfare has become normal. Insurgency and counterinsurgency, with its asymmetry, ideological construction, emphasis on the violent disruption and establishment of order, in which the ultimate stakes are the support of the people, is now the paradigmatic sort of warfare. From this perspective, the very human tasks of what used to be called empire and is now nation building, albeit nations on the received model—negotiation, translation, the establishment of order reconstruction, adjudication, and so forth—are not some more or less dispensable activities that come after military engagement. Political change is the only way to win even relatively local wars, as opposed to postponing or containing them. The United States has not understood this adequately in Iraq or even in Afghanistan.

And even local conflicts can no longer be understood locally, or even territorially. The problem presented by the failure of the U.S. government to take sufficient responsibility extends beyond the geographic context of the occupation of a defeated enemy. The actions of the United States with regard to Iraq and Afghanistan (and Israel and Palestine) matter throughout the Muslim world. Much of the administration's war on terror is secret, not just investigations, but wiretapping and various forms of internal and external spying; torture and other forms of interrogation; judicial and non-judicial processes, often not only closed to the public, but in undisclosed locations or denied altogether. International law is often ignored, or, like domestic law, radically interpreted in order to give the executive branch the maximum amount of discretion. While diplomacy and indeed legal process has always required a degree of discretion, in area after area the U.S. government has adopted a position of non-responsibility, which makes it difficult to imagine the government politically, as an actor

in some broader community. The United States in effect denies its presence in any such community, while simultaneously (and truthfully) maintaining that it has security and other interests everywhere. How are Muslims, who wish to understand the United States in some way other than bin Laden's, to argue about a government they do not know, a government powerful enough to be brazen about secrets, lies and denials? And so the United States, in its shadowy absence but undeniable presence, lends itself to conspiracy theories, to portrayal as the malevolent force behind the Muslim world's very real ills.

D. Being Patient

People have to discover how they are going to live in this time true to their beliefs, i.e., how they are going to be modern. Such discoveries cannot be made for them, and will come when they come. For the bureaucratic governments of liberal democracies, not just the United States, it will be difficult to be tolerant. Although tolerance has long been a liberal virtue, in this conflict tolerance is required regarding the substance of liberal modernity itself, as recently illustrated by the Danish cartoon imbroglio. Put directly, allowing Muslims to develop new forms of Islamic politics may require amelioration of certain demands dear to the hearts of Western reformers. Free speech is an obvious example, and the rights of women provide other examples, of areas in which "what is modern" seems so clear. While women should vote (how could *we* believe otherwise?), perhaps coming to that belief, making that belief central to a politics, cannot be accomplished overnight. But this is just an example, another question to be argued and decided elsewhere. The larger point is that we should be patient. After all, history has waited a long time for those of us in the United States and other Western countries to become (what we currently think of as) modern.

CONCLUSION

The policy realignment that emerges out of this reassessment of the Global Jihad is hardly radical; it is indeed far more traditional than much recent U.S. policy. It is true that the Global War on Terror will continue. Security concerns, and indeed wars, are unlikely to

disappear, and I am not advocating pacifism. But those things said, I believe that the strategic interests of the United States require a substantial change in the nation's stance towards, and prosecution of, this struggle. The United States should remember its virtues, rather than allow itself to be characterized as the demon in a distant nightmare. The United States should treat other individuals, peoples, and nations fairly, which often means individually, which tends to be difficult. The United States should take responsibility for its actions, not just because that is the right thing to do, but because it is impossible to be political without being present. Finally, even in the formation of foreign and security policy, our governing elites should be as supportive and patient as possible while hundreds of millions of Muslims variously and collectively determine what their modern politics will be like. The alternative appears to be the rejection of ordinary politics and its messiness for the sake of violence's clarity, bin Laden's kind of war.